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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates student placement practices and quality of instruction in the first grade reading program of the San Diego (California) City Schools. A previous study indicated that a disproportionately high percentage of Black and Hispanic students did not complete the grade-level textbook by the end of the first grade. Data were drawn from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student records in four selected schools and from meetings with a district-wide Teachers' Advisory Committee. The constant comparative method of hypothesis testing was followed so analysis could occur at the same time as the data were being gathered. The main conclusion is that by following the basal reader textbook almost exclusively and placing students into achievement groups the reading program may not be providing all first grade students equal opportunities to receive the highest quality reading instruction. Students with low-level reading skills need more time and assistance than they receive to become successful readers. An important secondary finding is that first-year teachers reported difficulty with pacing instruction and covering the prescribed material. Recommendations for staff action are discussed. The appendices include copies of the following data-gathering tools: (1) Student Placement in Basal Reader Observation Form; (2) Elementary Reading Textbook Assignment Record; and (3) Basic Category Codings of Teachers' Interview Responses and Behavioral Sequences from Classroom Observations. A list of 15 references is appended. (FMW)

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San Diego City Schools

PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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EQUITY IN STUDENT PLACEMENT AND READING INSTRUCTION AT FIRST GRADE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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January 31, 1989

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT REPORT

WD 026 710

EQUITY IN STUDENT PLACEMENT AND READING INSTRUCTION
AT FIRST GRADE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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January 31, 1989

San Diego City Schools
Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division
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SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS
Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division
Evaluation Department

EQUITY IN STUDENT PLACEMENT AND READING INSTRUCTION
AT FIRST GRADE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

SUMMARY

ISSUE

The evaluation was designed to examine the issue of equity in student placement as it relates to the district's reading program at first grade, in particular: 1) how reading instruction is carried out in first grade classrooms; and, 2) what enables some first graders to be successful and others to be placed in basal textbooks below the publisher's specified grade level. The evaluation serves as a follow-up to findings from previous San Diego City Schools' evaluations on equity in student placement practices (Evaluation Department Report Nos. 404 and 440) that less than half of first grade students completed the grade-level basal textbook specified by the publisher. Disproportionate to their enrollment in the district, high percentages of Black students and Hispanic students did not complete the grade-level textbook specified by the publisher by the end of first grade. The current evaluation is part of a five-year longitudinal study of equity in student placement and grouping practices conducted as a result of the district's Policy on Equity in Student Placement adopted by the Board of Education in March 1985.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on in-depth study of teachers' perspectives and observations of reading instruction in first grade classrooms, the evaluation yielded descriptive information about features of the district's reading program that may contribute to the high percent of students who complete first grade reading in below grade-level textbooks. The classroom observations and interview data showed that teachers are working hard to follow and complete the district's prescribed reading program for first grade. They should be recognized for their efforts and commended for trying to supplement and extend the literacy materials in order to achieve a more comprehensive reading program for students.

The main conclusion from the study is that by following the basal reader textbook almost exclusively and placing students into achievement groups, the district's reading program may not be providing all first grade students equal opportunities to receive the highest quality reading instruction. Students with low level reading skills need more time and assistance to become successful readers than they receive currently. Teachers report that they attempt to implement the policy on continuous progress and student reassessment by trying students out in different reading groups throughout the year. However, very few students actually moved into a different reading group (13.5 percent in the

current study). Students receive their reading instruction in achievement groups and continue working with their group members for seatwork and with the classroom aide during the reading period. They have limited interaction with students from other groups, and, for students in the low-level groups, few opportunities to learn the work skills and attitudes of the more successful students. In addition, classroom management and instructional practices such as using untrained aides for small group work with students, closely following the instructional approach prescribed in the teacher's guide for all groups, allotting equal time to high-level and low-level reading groups, and using a skill-based reading program are other features of the first grade reading program that should be changed so that all students receive a high quality program. Finally, an important secondary finding of the study was that first year teachers reported that they had trouble pacing their instruction and covering the prescribed materials. They needed more technical assistance from other teachers and staff development than was available.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAFF

The district's commitment to equity in education may not be achieved if high risk students such as those assigned to the low-level reading groups are not given extra assistance and allowed to interact with students assigned to higher level reading groups. Specific recommendations for staff action directed at correcting features of the current first grade reading program which deny students equal learning and social opportunities and result in less capable readers experiencing deficits are given below.

1. District administrative and teaching staff should assess the benefits versus the disadvantages of grouping students in basal textbooks for reading instruction especially in the primary grades because of the inflexible nature of the groups. Grouping should be used for specific skills and should be flexible and change according to need. The numbers of students remaining in the same group for the entire year should decrease.
2. If aides are used as a resource in the classroom, they need more training to be effective in their work with students.
3. Specific direction should be given to teachers on classroom management strategies and how to individualize instruction so that the less capable readers acquire the skills of successful readers such as learning to read fluently and to self-monitor their work. As identified by empirical studies (see Allington, 1984), this means additional reading sessions, increased opportunities for silent reading, and more contextual reading assignments.
4. District staff should re-think the focus of the reading program in first grade, particularly in light of the emphasis of the new state framework on an "integrated" and "literature-based" approach to language arts instruction. Provisions should be made so that teachers are enabled to implement an effective reading program. This means allocating time and resources for increased "teacher-to-teacher" assistance, staff development and follow-up, and a wide range of literacy materials.

5. Special provisions should be made for first-year teachers to receive increased technical assistance, more opportunities to learn from mentor teachers, and staff development beginning immediately in the school year.

RATIONALE

The recommendations are based on evaluation findings from a descriptive study using data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, school documents, and review of the research literature. A teachers' advisory committee was established to review and discuss the findings in terms of their applicability to other first grade classrooms. Analyses and interpretation of these data generated the conclusions and recommendations. Each recommendation addresses an identified program need.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Prior to budgetary planning for the 1989-90 school year, the district's instructional priorities for the primary grades and commitment to the Policy on Equity in Student Placement should be established by key decision makers. If recommendations from the current evaluation are implemented, budget increases will be needed for technical assistance to teachers, staff development, training of classroom aides, and restructuring the reading program in the primary grades.

EQUITY IN STUDENT PLACEMENT AND READING INSTRUCTION
AT FIRST GRADE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

ISSUE

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BACKGROUND

The intent of the district's Policy on Equity in Student Placement is for all students to have access to the highest degree of quality education. Students are grouped for reading instruction as determined by their performance on standardized and criterion-based tests and teacher judgment as recommended in the district's Reading Handbook K-6 (1984). The smaller size of the reading groups allows teachers to pace instruction to meet the individual student's needs. District Procedure 6020 specifies that students are to progress to an appropriate group based on their mastery of the instructional materials. This suggests that, optimally, students receive reading instruction in basal reader textbooks that are at or above grade-level.

In most elementary school classrooms, the basal reader series is considered to "drive" reading instruction (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1986). Based on his research, Shannon (1982) indicates that instruction in basal reader textbooks makes up from 75 to 90 percent of how time is spent during reading in many classrooms. Findings from the evaluation of the district's reading program (Evaluation Department Report No. 441) showed that 88 percent of first and fourth grade teachers used the basal reading materials daily. They emphasized the basal reading strand considerably more for reading instruction than the literature, reinforcement, and content strands of the district's reading program. In light of the overall importance of reading in the elementary school curriculum and teachers' heavy reliance on the basal reader textbook, student placement in the basal reader was selected as a means of evaluating student progress and equitable practices in grouping elementary school students for instruction.

A previous evaluation study of student progress through the basal reader (Evaluation Department Report No. 404) found that at first grade less than half of the students completed the grade-level basal reader textbooks specified by the publisher during the 1985-86 school year. In the Houghton Mifflin Reading

Series used by the district, the following textbooks are recommended to be completed by the end of first grade: Bears, Balloons, Boats, Sunshine, and Moonbeams. The evaluation findings indicated that fewer Black students completed the publisher's specified grade-level textbook, Moonbeams, than did students in the other racial/ethnic groups in comparison to their representation in the district's student enrollment. An evaluation of students' progress through the basal reader for the 1986-87 school year found that more students completed the basal readers at or above grade-level at all grades than reported for the previous year (Evaluation Department Report No. 440). However, differences continued in student placement, progress in the basal readers, and differential completion rates among racial/ethnic groups.

Lower percentages of Hispanic students and Black students completed the publisher's specified grade-level basal textbooks at the end of the school year than White students and Asian students at all grade levels. Ninety-four percent of all kindergarteners completed the school year at or above the specified grade-level textbook; 52.5 percent of all first graders completed the school year at or above the specified grade-level textbook placement. This drop in the completion rate between kindergarten and first grade is of particular concern in light of other evaluation findings which showed most first grade students had been placed in basal reader textbooks that were at or above grade level at the beginning of the school year.

The use of achievement groups for reading instruction has been widely studied. Based on her review of the research literature, Hiebert (1983) suggested that the experience of receiving instruction in the high-level reading group may be very different from that of being in the low-level group in terms of the teacher's allocation of instructional time and social interaction patterns. These, in turn, could influence the learning and social outcomes for students in terms of reading development and affective and social behavior. A frequently voiced concern in the research literature is once students are assigned to reading groups, they are unlikely to be moved. Allington (1983) argues that good and poor readers differ in their reading ability because of differences in teacher instruction as much as variations in individual learning styles or aptitudes. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkerson (1985) suggest that a student's future attainment is more likely to be influenced by initial reading placement than by the student's actual abilities. A related concern is that the gap between the achievement groups increases significantly as children progress through elementary school, and there seems to be a good deal of truth to the statement "once a bluejay, always a bluejay."

The current evaluation addresses two broad issues. The first issue relates to how reading instruction is carried out in first grade classrooms through use of the instructional materials, ability group assignments, time allocation, teacher-student interactions, pacing of content, individual learning styles, and teaching practices. All may influence the high percentage of students completing first grade in below grade-level basal reader textbooks. The second issue is to identify what enables some students to complete the first grade reading textbooks successfully and others to be less successful. In the earlier evaluation studies, fewer Black students and Hispanic students were found to have completed the publisher's specified grade-level basal readers by the end of first grade than other racial/ethnic groups. This disparity among racial/ethnic

groups in the basal reader textbook completion rates was noted beginning in first grade and continued throughout the elementary school years. The finding suggests many Black students and Hispanic students may be falling behind in acquiring basic skills and, therefore, learning with a real disadvantage from early on in their education.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Which characteristics about the first grade reading program contribute to the high percent of first grade students found in previous district evaluation studies to be below the publisher's specified grade-level basal reader textbooks at the completion of first grade?
 - a. How far do students typically proceed into the reading program prescribed for first grade?
 - b. What happens as students begin to lag behind in the program? What efforts are made to catch them up?
 - c. To what degree are the district policies on continuous progress (progress through the reading series determined by the individual student's instructional needs) and student reassessment (assessments conducted periodically to ensure the students' correct placement in the series) implemented in first grade classrooms?
 - d. Are students moved into different achievement groups as appropriate during the school year based on their reading progress?
 - e. What are the types of interactional patterns observed between teachers and students within the context of reading instruction? Do differences exist between achievement groups, racial/ethnic groups?
 - f. Are there characteristics inherent in the Houghton Mifflin Reading Series, as implemented in first grade classrooms that lead to many students not completing the publisher's specified grade-level textbooks?
2. What other factors enable some first graders to be successful in the first grade reading program and other students to be placed in textbooks that are below the grade level as specified by the publisher?

EVALUATION METHODS

The evaluation was designed to explore the findings of Evaluation Department Report Nos. 404 and 440. While those evaluations present a quantitative picture of student placement practices at the elementary school level, the intent of the current evaluation was to describe reading instruction in first grade classrooms and identify instructional practices which enable some first grade students to be successful and others to be placed in below grade-level basal textbooks as specified by the publisher.

The evaluation was conducted using qualitative methods. A qualitative approach employs the fieldwork methods associated with anthropology and has been described as naturalistic or ethnographic research. Dorr-Bremme (1985) advises that the goal of such evaluation is to describe and explain a program and its consequences in terms of the points of view and beliefs of the participants. Wolcott (1984) goes further by suggesting that ethnography can be viewed as an alternative to evaluation. Its purposes are to understand rather than judge and to examine human behavior as part of larger cultural systems. The data are collected to describe the participants' actions and events as they occur in the natural setting. Unstructured observations and intensive interviews are used to gather the data. Based on specific themes, recurrent patterns, and concepts that are identified in the accumulating data, analytic categories are developed which shape further data collection and explicate daily activities and events from the participants' perspective.

The main focus of inquiry was to examine teachers' and students' actions within the context of the first grade reading program. The second focus was to understand the teachers' perspectives about the reading program and give close attention to what teachers considered to be its successful and unsuccessful features. The evaluation questions established the study's scope and information that was collected. Special attention was given to conducting an evaluation study which would yield credible, applicable, ethical results following qualitative methods and at the same time, meet the informational needs of the district. See Williams (1986) for a more detailed discussion of the potential conflicts between evaluation standards and criteria for conducting ethnographic studies.

The data elements were as follows: 1) observations of classroom instruction; 2) simultaneous analysis of the observations to develop conceptual categories based on recurrent routines, events, and interaction patterns contained in the observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); 3) interviews to further explicate the observations and obtain teachers' perceptions and thoughts about the first grade reading program; and, 4) teachers' documents about individual student's progress through the basal textbooks along with recommendations for next year's basal reader placement. Teachers of the primary grades along with representatives from Language Arts Education and the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division served as an advisory committee to review and discuss the evaluation findings in terms of their applicability to other first grade classrooms.

Limitations of the study are that the teachers' participation in the study was voluntary, and the sample size was limited to one first grade classroom at four elementary schools. However, these limitations may be offset by the amount of detail and in-depth analysis that were performed to study teachers' actions and classroom events as related to reading instruction and consequence for students learning. In addition, the classroom observations were conducted to study teachers' reading instruction as it occurred during the scheduled reading period. The focus of the evaluation was to study teachers' instruction in the basic strand of the district's reading program. Other aspects of the reading program such as the reinforcement, content, or literature strands were not directly observed but studied through data obtained from the teacher interviews.

Sample

Four elementary schools were selected for study based on several criteria. First, in order to extend the data base of reading observations from the K-6 Reading Evaluation (Evaluation Department Report No. 441), schools were selected from the sample of 18 schools studied in the previous evaluation. Based on the California Assessment Program (CAP) test results for spring 1987, seven elementary schools were matched by sixth grade reading scores within the expected performance bands determined by socioeconomic indices and percent of Limited-English-Proficient students. One school was selected from each of the four school operations areas with attention given to each school's representativeness by geographic location, school enrollment, racial/ethnic census, number of Limited English Proficient students, and participation in categorically funded programs and the district's Achievement Goals Program (AGP). Participation in the study was voluntary. All school principals who were contacted agreed to participate in the study. The schools selected were Doyle, Freese, Silver Gate, and Walker. Freese is identified as a minority-isolated school.

Each school principal selected one first grade teacher in whose classroom the observations would take place. The teachers' participation in the study was voluntary. The four teachers selected were all experienced teachers. Three of the teachers had between 18 and 22 years' experience teaching in this district. One teacher was in her first year as a contracted teacher with San Diego City Schools. However, she had more than ten previous years as a substitute, basic skills teacher, and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. All four teachers appeared to be regarded as competent by their peers and comfortable with the observations taking place in their classrooms. Because of the high interest expressed by the other first grade teachers, group interviews involving all of the first grade teachers were conducted at each of the four schools in addition to the interviews with the teachers whose classrooms had been observed.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations were conducted during reading instruction; ranged from 105 to 120 minutes; and, took place during March and April 1988. The observations took place on three consecutive days (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) at each of the four schools. Prior to actually conducting the observations for the study, a first grade classroom at Lindbergh Elementary School was observed for two days to establish guidelines for recording the field notes. In each classroom studied, extensive verbatim notes of the teachers' and students' actions during reading instruction were recorded by two observers: the author with academic training and research experience in the use of ethnographic techniques and a resource teacher who was trained to conduct classroom observations specifically for this evaluation. The reading instruction was carried out as the first instructional activity in the morning at each school. The observers arrived before the instruction began and stayed until the teacher completed the instructional program. This was marked by the teacher dismissing the students for recess at three of the schools and by lunch dismissal at the fourth. Reading instruction was scheduled to take place between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. at two schools; 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the third school; and, 9:15 to 11:15 a.m. at the fourth school.

The field notes were recorded using the form contained in Appendix A. The form is a revised version of an observation form developed by the author for previous studies of teacher-student interactions in classrooms. The time was recorded every five minutes and running notes were kept on the actions of the teacher and students during reading. By using two observers, one observer could focus on the reading instruction as each group took part in the reading circle with the teacher; while the second observer focused on the students' actions during independent seatwork and with the instructional aide. Each observer followed at least one achievement group for the reading circle, independent seatwork, and small group work with the instructional aide in order to allow that particular observer to concentrate on the sequence of events which occurred during the daily reading program. At the completion of the observations at each school, the observers held a debriefing session to clarify and develop concepts emerging from the data. Several debriefing sessions included other members of the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division.

Teacher Interviews

At the four schools, interviews were conducted with the first grade teachers, principals, and, at one school, the vice principal. The interviews were held after school hours and ranged from 45 to 80 minutes in length. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions intended to explore the teachers' thoughts about the district's policy on continuous progress, redeployment of students to other classrooms for reading, basic skills instruction in first grade, assistance for special needs students, and other issues emerging from the classroom observations or concerns raised by the teachers.

School Documents' Review

An additional meeting was scheduled with each of the four teachers to review teacher documents and records of student progress in the basal reader along with recommendations for the next year's placement. These meetings took place at the end of the school year. The data were summarized using the Elementary Reading Textbooks Assignment form developed for the evaluation of the district's K-6 reading program. The form is contained in Appendix B.

Teachers' Advisory Committee

An advisory committee to the evaluation was composed of 14 members representing teachers with experience teaching first grade along with staff from the Language Arts Education Department and Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division. Teachers with broad experience teaching first grade reading were nominated by the Language Arts Education staff. Teachers were selected from schools in each of the four school operations areas. In order to obtain a broad-based view of the district's reading program, teachers on the advisory committee were not from the four schools included in the study. The committee met three times between March and May 1988 to review the evaluation findings. Minutes were kept of each meeting and shared with the participants. In addition to the teachers' advisory committee, a two hour meeting was held with the principals from the four schools in the study along with selected district management staff with expertise in reading to review and respond to the evaluation findings. (Appendix C contains a list of the Advisory Committee members.)

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method of hypothesis testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was followed so analysis could occur at the same time as the data were being gathered. The data collected through classroom observations and teacher interviews were compared and analyzed to identify recurrent patterns and relationships in the teachers' interactions with students within the context of reading instruction. Analytic categories were generated and developed for coding the data and testing emergent hypotheses. This allowed the evaluator to examine the instructional and social organization of the first grade reading program as it emerged from the data. The data were formatted and analyzed using The Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth & Clark, 1986). The Ethnograph is designed to accept qualitative data such as text from observations and interviews to manage the data for analysis. Segments of text can be organized into meaningful elements to search for recurrent patterns and themes and develop conceptual categories to explain the linkages between them.

The observation data and interview data from the four classrooms were combined and treated as a single database. The data were coded into five major categories developed to study the evaluation questions and respond to issues emerging from debriefing sessions held with the Evaluation Department staff and the Teachers' Advisory Committee meetings. These major categories were: 1) achievement grouping for instruction; 2) instructional materials; 3) classroom management and organization; 4) interaction patterns between teachers and students; and, 5) individual learning styles. Based on recurring actions, concepts, and phrases noted in the data, subcategories, based on observed behavioral sequences and teachers' interview responses were developed to provide more in-depth analysis. These findings were further studied following the procedures outlined by Becker (1958): testing observed relationships in the field setting; developing frequency and distribution checks; and, confirming hypotheses through further analysis. Appendix D contains a complete listing of the categories and subcategories of data.

RESULTS

The findings from the classroom observations, teacher interviews, and review of school documents are reported in this section. The classroom settings in which the observations took place are described first. Then, results are given for each of the five major categories: 1) achievement grouping for instruction; 2) instructional materials; 3) classroom management and organization; 4) interactional patterns between teachers and students; and 5) individual learning styles.

Classroom Settings

The physical settings of the classrooms that were observed varied considerably. One class was located in a small bungalow room. An instructional aide or parent volunteer worked in the classroom assisting students with independent seatwork or grading papers while the teacher worked with students in the reading groups. Two classrooms were loft-type rooms with carpeting and an adjoining small conference room where the instructional aides worked with small groups of students. One classroom was conducted in a more traditional setting and the instructional aide worked with student groups in the hallway. At this school, five other rooms also had instructional aides who worked with students in the

hallway at the same time. All classrooms were attractively decorated with bulletin boards and posters, contained learning stations, and had shelves of books for students' independent reading. Parent volunteers were observed working in three of the classrooms. The teachers reported that the parent volunteers came weekly and corrected paperwork, put up bulletin boards, assisted students with seatwork, or taught computer skills.

In each of the four classrooms studied, the teachers used the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program as basic instructional materials for teaching reading. The teachers were observed to provide direct instruction to reading groups ranging from five to eleven students. Two teachers studied conducted three reading groups; two conducted four groups with one of these teachers instructing Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the district's English for Limited English Proficient (ELEPS) program during this time.

The reading circles ranged in length from 20 to 38 minutes with a median of 28 minutes and were conducted daily. The teachers followed a similar schedule of first working with students reading in the lowest-level basal reader, next with the middle-level basal reader, and ending the reading instruction by working with the highest-level reading group. While the teacher was working with a reading group, the other students worked independently on class assignments at their seats or with other students; worked in their assigned reading group with the instructional aide; or, worked at learning centers in the classroom.

Achievement Grouping for Instruction

In each classroom observed, students were grouped for reading instruction by ability as determined by their basal textbook placement. These groups served as a primary setting in which the students received their daily reading instruction from the teacher. The teachers who participated in the study agreed that three groups were ideal. One teacher stated that she wouldn't even attempt to form four reading groups unless she had a student teacher. In two classrooms, the teachers had organized their reading program into three achievement groups as recommended in the district's Reading Handbook K-6 (1984). Two teachers organized their program into four achievement groups. Of these, one teacher worked with a group of LEP students using the district's ELEPS program and selected activities from the Bears basal reader. In addition, she conducted three reading groups. One of these LEP students also successfully participated in another reading group in the classroom. In the other classroom, the teacher felt that she could best work with her students in four achievement groups, with an average size of seven students. She recognized that this exceeded the district's recommended three groups for reading (Reading Handbook K-6, page 38). The achievement groups, as defined by basal textbook placement, that the four teachers were working with when the classroom observations were conducted are given in Table 1. It might be noted that three out of four of the teachers had two groups in the same basal textbook but in different units. A breakdown of the reading groups by racial/ethnic groups is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1
BASAL READER PLACEMENTS OF STUDENTS
IN THE CLASSROOMS OBSERVED

	Number of Students					
	ELEPS	Balloons (C)	Boats (D)	Sunshine (E)	Moonbeams (F)	Skylights (G)
School A	-	8	11	9	-	-
School B	-	-	-	6 (high) 7 (low)	-	10
School C	5	-	9 (high) 5 (low)	-	11	-
School D	-	-	-	6 (high) 9 (low)	8	7

N=14 groups

*Observations conducted March to April 1988.

TABLE 2
BREAKDOWN OF THE COMBINED READING GROUPS
BY RACE/ETHNICITY*

	Hispanic	White	Black	Asian	Portu- guese	Filipino	Indo- chinese	Total
ELEPS	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	5
Balloons (C)	1	2	1	-	2	1	1	8
Boats (D)	3	6	13	-	3	-	-	25
Sunshine (E)	3	19	6	3	-	2	4	37
Moonbeams (F)	3	9	4	-	-	1	2	19
Skylights (G)	-	8	-	5	-	3	1	17
TOTAL	12	44	24	8	5	7	11	111

*No students were identified as American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Pacific Islander.

The teachers observed and their colleagues who participated in the interviews reported that they typically arrived at their decision to place students into one achievement group over another based upon: 1) power cards and the previous teachers' recommendations; 2) Houghton Mifflin assessment procedures; and, 3) "trial and error" where a student was tried out in several achievement groups before a final decision was made. The latter was attempted when a student did not clearly fit into an established achievement group. The teachers who participated in the study indicated that they tended to assume students made changes over the summer and attempted informal assessments and placements for many students. As one teacher stated, "I need to spend time particularly at the beginning of the year working with the children and watching them real closely. Ian and Michael started off real low but moved up several groups during the year. I watched their participation in the group, oral reading, and their test (magazine) scores. I could see that they understood what was going on over and above how they tested. Then, I tried them out in a higher group."

When assessment was needed to make a placement decision for students who had been previously at the school, an assessment, usually with the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), was conducted. Students who were new to the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program were described as tending to test low and begin to catch up and work at their "true" achievement level only after they had been in the class for awhile. The teachers indicated that these students needed special attention in order to identify their most appropriate textbook.

Students who move between schools were another group of special concern to the teachers when attempting to place students into achievement groups. Often these students are assigned to the classroom after reading groups have been established for the year. The teachers report this causes problems as they try to match the student to an achievement group either in their classroom or through redeployment to another room. Several teachers at the same school gave the following examples:

"I really try to get them into groups in my room first. If that doesn't work, then I try a group with another teacher. A little girl just came into my class from another school, and she had just finished Moonbeams. I tried to move her into Skylights, but they (her students) were just too far ahead and moving too fast. So, she ended doing Moonbeams again."

"John, for one, got double duty by doing Sunshine twice. He came late in the year and just didn't fit into any of my groups. He had finished Sunshine, but Moonbeams was just too hard for him. He fits with the Sunshine group, and next year he'll get to Moonbeams."

Analysis of the interview data indicated that teachers typically report that their reading groups are established by the sixth week of school. Several teachers noted that this is often when many students start to "catch on" after a slow start at the beginning of the school year. When this occurs, the teachers reported they attempt placement in a higher achievement group on an informal or trial basis. One teacher said, "I tell the parents and the child that we'll try it out for a week to see how the new placement is going to work. So far this year, I've moved seven (students) to higher groups, and five have worked out." This teacher and her colleagues at the school felt strongly that often the

student has the skills to go on to a higher group, but not the attention and motivation necessary to be successful in that placement. A teacher at another school emphasized that students need to be "comfortable with where they're reading" and stated that she tends to "move students around a lot informally" in order to find a satisfactory match between student and achievement group.

The district's Reading Handbook K-6 (1984) specifies that "class grouping must be flexible, allowing individual growth and achievement. It is important that teachers move students from one group to another as their needs and rates of development change, regardless of their grade placement" (page 39). While the teachers may informally place many students into different reading groups (flexible grouping) on a trial basis throughout the school year, documents' review indicated that actually 15 students (13.5 percent) among the four classrooms combined were moved between achievement groups. Of these 15 students, 13 students were moved to a higher level reading group. The results are presented below.

- ° Six students moved from the low to a middle-level reading group.
- ° One student who was new to the district and the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program was moved from the low to high reading group.
- ° Four students were moved from the middle-level to the high reading group.

Two students in one of the classes had been determined to be progressing much more rapidly than other students and were redeployed to another classroom where they were placed into Moonbeams. The placement was evaluated as unsuccessful by the receiving teacher. After approximately one month, the students were returned and placed into a lower-level textbook in the middle reading group in their classroom. They continued in this placement for the rest of the school year. Of the four teachers studied, two teachers moved six students into different reading groups; one moved five students; and, one did not move any students. All of these students were redeployed into groups reading in basal textbooks at or above grade-level as specified by the publisher.

The teachers at three of the schools indicated that the school had a policy of not placing students more than one basal textbook level above grade level. Among the four schools, only one student was reported to be placed more than one level above his grade. Although one teacher said she had a boy who had just finished Skylights. She thought that he could go a lot higher in the program but was not being placed into higher level textbooks because of the policy. She reported that she gives him independent work in the literature strand.

The teachers interviewed indicated that they used redeployment of students for reading as a last resort because of pragmatic concerns. A teacher described redeployment as, "something I use only when I'm desperate, and there's absolutely no way that student will fit in with any group in the class. It's so hard to find time to communicate with other teachers on a regular basis. You just don't know what's happening with the students who aren't with you for reading." Teachers at another school indicated that the traffic in and out of the room as students were redeployed gets to be a real problem. They suggested that students should be redeployed, if at all, for the entire reading period and return to their classrooms all at the same time. They believed that this arrangement would reduce the traffic and help the students be on time for their reading groups.

Redeployment, as a means of grouping students who did not fit with any of the reading groups established in the classroom, was generally not popular with the teachers. As a group, they redeployed students as a "last resort."

- ° At two of the schools studied, the teachers did not redeploy any students into other classrooms. One of these teachers worked with a LEP student who participated with her lowest reading group.
- ° A third teacher in the study included four students from another first grade class with her lowest reading group; one student into her highest reading group; and, she redeployed three students who were placed into basal readers above any reading group in the class into another classroom.
- ° The fourth teacher in the study included two students from another class into her lowest group and four students into her middle-level groups. She redeployed two students who were placed into basal readers above her top group into other classes, and unsuccessfully attempted to redeploy two students who returned after approximately one month to her middle-level reading group.

At the end of the school year, each teacher who was observed participated in an interview. At this time, teachers' records were reviewed to determine the basal textbook placement for each student at the completion of first grade. From these records, it was determined that 50.5 percent of all students in the four classrooms completed first grade at or above the grade-level basal textbook specified for Houghton Mifflin Reading Program. The teachers indicated that they would recommend that all students be placed into the next level basal textbook in the series next year. Still, these students would begin in second grade reading in below grade-level basal textbooks. Three students from three different schools were recommended to be re-evaluated before assigning them to a basal reader. These results closely correspond with the districtwide finding of 52.5 percent of all first graders completed first grade at or above the publisher's specified grade-level textbook presented in Evaluation Department Report No. 440, April 1987.

The ending textbook placements of students in the four classrooms broken out by racial/ethnic groups are presented in Table 3. First grade students completing the school year in the Boats and Sunshine textbooks are considered below grade level in the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program. Students in Moonbeams are at grade level, and those students in Skylights are above grade level. The percent of students reading at or above grade-level for the different racial/ethnic groups corresponds with the districtwide results given in the earlier report. However, in the current study, a lower percent of Black students completed the school year reading at or above grade-level than noted in the previous year's evaluation. The current study's finding of 29.1 percent of students reading at or above grade-level corresponds with the finding of 26.3 percent reported two years' ago in Evaluation Department Report No. 404, March 1986. The high numbers of Hispanic and Portuguese students reading below grade-level may be due to the fact that many of these students come from bilingual backgrounds or from non-English speaking backgrounds and had limited experience reading in English. The similarity between these results and those from the earlier evaluations indicates that the classrooms observed were fairly representative of the student placement practices in the district.

TABLE 3
STUDENT STATUS IN BASAL READER TEXTBOOKS
AT THE COMPLETION OF FIRST GRADE BY
RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS*

Ending Textbook Placement	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian		Portu- guese		Filipino		Indo- chinese		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boats (D)	1	10.0	4	9.1	4	16.7	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	16.7	0	0.0	11	11.1
Sunshine (E)	5	50.0	14	31.8	13	54.2	1	12.5	3	75.0	1	16.7	1	33.3	38	38.4
Moonbeams (F)	4	40.0	18	40.9	7	29.1	2	25.0	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	33.3	33	33.3
Skylights (G)	0	0.0	8	18.2	0	0.0	5	62.5	0	0.0	3	50.0	1	33.3	17	17.2
TOTAL	10	100	44	100	24	100	8	100	4	100	6	100	3	99.9	99	100

*Twelve identified LEP students not included.

Instructional Materials

The Houghton Mifflin materials are used to teach the basic strand of the district's reading program. Each teacher studied organized her daily reading instruction around the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program in terms of teaching strategies, learning activities, and the time allocated for instruction. The reading materials, practice exercises or seatwork, and teaching methods were similar across the four classrooms, and implementation of the basic strand of the reading program was carried out following uniform instructional procedures.

The teachers defined the basic strand of the reading program in terms of the specific skills that were to be taught and the degree to which students mastered those skills as measured by their performance on magazine tests. For example, 24 skills, e.g., cause-effect relationships, short and long vowel sounds, multi-meaning words, main idea, are taught in Sunshine. The students are tested on selected skills on a test given at the end of each magazine. A passing score of 80 percent or higher determines mastery. Student progress in reading is measured by these tests.

The teachers observed and those who participated in the interviews or with the advisory committee were moderately, but not entirely satisfied with the basal reader series. However, they acknowledged that the basal series had advantages over others they had used. Examination of the interview protocols and advisory committee minutes showed that most teacher comments were about weaknesses in the basal reader series. As a group, teachers were consistent in their identification of the program's weaknesses. A dominant theme was that there is simply too much material in Houghton Mifflin to be covered in first grade and insufficient time to cover it all well during the school year. Comments such as those given below were commonly voiced by the teachers.

"I've counted, and we need 192 days to teach all of the skills that need to be taught in first grade. And that's if the kids are working

at grade-level, not coming in [to first grade] reading below Bears! There are so many skills in each unit, one and two each unit. Every lesson is something new, and there's no time to reinforce it all."

"I can't possibly teach all of the skills that I'm supposed to. Just too much to teach, and I always end up skipping some of the skills, usually the ones that I know they'll come back to in second grade."

While the teachers expressed concern that too many skills were taught in first grade, they could not identify which specific skills, if any, were unnecessary. They viewed the skills taught as important, providing an essential foundation for reading, and that first grade was the appropriate time for these skills to be taught. As one teacher stated, "When are they (students) going to learn the skills if they don't get them now? Certainly not in the upper (elementary) grades or junior high!" The more experienced teachers seemed to have a sense of how to pace their reading instruction, e.g., which skills should be emphasized. Less experienced teachers felt that they should be pacing their instruction more rapidly than they were as illustrated by the following teacher's comments.

"I probably do everything differently because I'm new. The rookie. I started the program much too slow, but now that I've had experience, I'm going to have to double up. I think we need a pacing chart for Getting Ready To Read to move them through faster. First grade teachers who have children in Getting Ready To Read need to get them through real fast. It's my first year with the program in first grade. After going through the basal once, then I know how to move them through certain parts faster and slower on the other parts. I'm particularly concerned about the children who are at-risk."

The teachers felt strongly that phonics needed to be introduced through a combination of direct instruction of phonetic rules and more opportunities given for students to practice the word-attack skills in context. Most teachers felt that the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program was weak on phonics at first grade and not enough time and practice given to the long and short vowel sounds. Many felt that vocabulary development and adequate reinforcement of sight words were missing from the program; skills needed by their "low" achieving students. Some teachers believed that there was too much time spent on punctuation skills which should be taught less formally in first grade. Others suggested that critical thinking skills such as drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes needs to be introduced during Bears, Balloons, and Boats but not formally tested.

While the teachers viewed the skills taught as essential, they expressed concerns about the manner in which the skills were to be presented. The following teacher's comment was typical; "The skills are just fine, but teaching them the way we do slows down - it almost interferes with the flow of reading." As observed, teachers closely followed the guide in delivering instruction to their reading groups. They used the instruction charts, introduced reading passages, assessed students' comprehension, assigned seatwork, and kept the students on task using the prescribed procedures. In short, there were simply no surprises in the reading instruction observed in any of the classrooms we studied. However, the teachers questioned whether, in following this approach, their reading instruction was as effective as it could be. One example was that

many teachers felt the use of the instruction charts as recommended in the teachers' guide disrupted "true" reading. The following teachers' comments from an interview conducted at one of the four schools observed are illustrative of the teachers' concerns.

"They (students) need to spend much more time learning decoding and comprehension by reading. It slows down "true" reading to teach these skills using the reading charts."

"The charts should be optional. Skills need to be practiced while they're (students) reading, not in isolation."

"The publisher places the skills (instruction) right in the middle of the story. Just as the children are getting interested in the story, we have to stop and do the skills, and they lose comprehension."

"I tell my kids that the chart is just like the vitamins and the reading is the meal. This helps them understand why we do it this way."

Another recurrent concern was the strong emphasis on the magazine tests to determine students' mastery of the reading skills and their basal textbook placement. Indeed, students are well aware that important decisions are made based on their test performance. This is demonstrated by one first grade student's explanation to the observers, "If I get too many circles (failed items) that goes down on my record, and I can't go on to Moonbeams." Watson et al. (1987) point out that basal tests are typically not widely field-tested using standard norming procedures. Teachers raised many concerns about the tests specific to format, wording of the questions, and why some skills were heavily emphasized while others were not. The teachers agreed for the most part that the basal textbooks were well done, but described the basal tests in terms such as "hastily conceived," "unprofessional," and "almost amateurish."

Despite these concerns, teachers freely admitted that they aligned their instruction to hit hard on skills they knew would be tested even if they, as professionals did not consider a particular skill to be essential. As one teacher stated, "Are we teaching to the test? I don't agree with it at all, but if we don't cover that skill the children will never pass the test! One chance on some skills, and you better make sure that particular skill gets covered." Another teacher noted, "We're so busy teaching to the test that we're losing sight of what reading is all about. I wonder if we're teaching reading or isolated skills?" Also, of concern, was the degree to which their instruction and the magazine tests were aligned with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) used as part of the district's testing program.

Many of the teachers who participated in the interviews or on the advisory committee raised the question "What if a student can read but can't pass the test?" As a group, they didn't give any clear indication as to how this problem was handled. However, individual teachers suggested that they were more likely than not to move a student ahead into the next level basal reader. Their comments, for the most part, were couched to reflect that these decisions were supported by other evidence drawn from group participation or individual work

with the student. In reviewing teachers' records, it was clear that some students were moved to the next level textbook even though they hadn't passed the magazine test. Teachers indicated that this was done for students who were very likely to succeed in the next basal reader.

In addition to using the Houghton Mifflin materials such as the instruction chart, Practice Books, and Bonus Books to supplement the basal textbooks, teachers reinforced their reading program with phonics and word recognition activities. One teacher spent the first ten minutes of each day teaching phonics to the entire group. The other teachers taught phonics using their own materials to supplement Houghton Mifflin with the reading groups. All of the teachers used phonics worksheets in addition to Houghton Mifflin with their classes. These first grade teachers felt very strongly that phonics and word recognition (sight words) were essential elements of the reading program and not adequately covered in Houghton Mifflin. Examples of their specific concerns are given below.

"Half of the first magazine test in Sunshine is vowels. Children don't pass, and we have to teach and reteach them. There aren't enough materials in Houghton Mifflin to teach them properly."

"The kids aren't getting vowel sounds before Sunshine. The first grade program, from the start, should be phonics."

"Sight words are missing altogether from the program. The children need instant recognition (of words) if they're going to become confident readers."

"We need a transition book between Getting Ready To Read and Bears. Kids are one-third of the way through Getting Ready To Read before they realize that this is reading. They're not ready to make the leap into Bears especially if they start it the next year in first grade. They're just not prepared!"

"I think that we should stop with Sunshine in first grade for most kids. You can go a lot further with second graders who start (the year) low, they have the maturity. You just can't go the distance with first graders who aren't ready, especially the ones who are immature or have problems."

The teachers in the study were all observed to use supplementary materials to Houghton Mifflin in their reading program. The teachers in two classes had their instructional aide work with students by achievement groups in supplemental readers such as those in an older California state reading series or do enrichment activities in the bonus book, weekly readers, and other materials daily for 20 to 30 minutes during the reading period. Another of the teachers used a different basal reader series (Harper Row) which she felt had a strong phonics approach with all of her students at the beginning of the year. She used supplemental reading materials as her reading groups were in between basal readers.

The fourth teacher used supplemental materials for whole-group instruction of phonics daily. This same teacher reported that her low group were not making any progress in Boats. This group was composed of five students of whom three were recommended for retention in first grade. In March, she began instructing

these students in the Linguistic Reader and, also, continued using Boats Practice Book. This new approach was judged successful, and in May, she moved the group into the next level Linguistic Reader. She commented, "I wish I had tried this sooner. They (students) were just stuck in a rut and not making any progress. Boats depends on sight words, and the children just couldn't learn. They needed a totally different approach."

A number of teachers raised the concern that because they are trying so hard to cover everything in the reading program, students are not getting time to simply enjoy reading. As expressed by one teacher, "No time for fun activities in first grade like we used to have. We don't have time to do reader's theater anymore." Other concerns raised by the teachers were that the district prescribed pacing charts did not allow time for students to reread familiar stories. As voiced by one teacher, "with our hectic pacing, the kids aren't getting enough time to really be comfortable reading the stories." Additionally, teachers strongly emphasized that reading needs to be better integrated into the content areas and throughout the curriculum. One teacher on the advisory committee stated, "My belief is reading instruction doesn't just take place during reading period. They (students) read and write in science and social studies as much as they do during reading. Teachers need to realize that reading doesn't end at 11:00, but it goes on all day!"

The teachers were aware, to varying degrees, of the newly adopted English-Language Arts State Framework Curriculum (California State Department of Education, 1987). Most were unaware that the recommended program was literature-based emphasizing in-depth study of core literary works, reading literature beyond the core works, and increased reading for pleasure. The majority of teachers who participated in the study knew that a district reading textbook series was up for adoption in 1990-91. Their response tended to be, "Oh no, we're just beginning to learn how to use this one!" However, they were very clear about the essential elements that a new basal series should contain, such as stronger phonics instruction for first grade, more alternative approaches for the less capable readers, and more strategies on how to integrate reading across the classroom curriculum.

Classroom Management and Organization

Teachers establish a system for managing and organizing learning activities in the classroom. As a group, teachers in the study tried to follow the reading program and pacing charts recommended in the district's Reading Handbook (1984) and the Organizer (1985). Direct reading instruction was provided in the reading groups for an average of 28 minutes. The teachers worked with each group in a reading circle following the script provided by the Houghton Mifflin Teacher's Guide. One of the teachers observed strictly followed her guide and rarely made spontaneous comments to the group. Two teachers provided a combination of exercises recommended by the guide and their own activities. While the fourth teacher used the guide, she supplemented the guide more heavily with her own materials and activities than did the other teachers. All four teachers kept their guides close at hand, and referred to them while conducting their reading groups. The teachers were all observed to use the Houghton Mifflin supplementary materials such as the instructional skills charts on at

least one of the days that their class was observed. Each reading group received assignments in their Practice Book. The Bonus Books were used at one of the four schools on the days that the classrooms were observed.

Table 4 presents the basal textbooks completed for the reading groups in each classroom. This table illustrates differences in pacing and does not address intensity or the quality of instruction provided to each group. The teachers indicated that they tried to follow the recommended pacing of one to two days for a unit. For their high students, the pacing was not a problem. The high-level groups covered substantially more reading material than the low groups in each class. Also, the middle- and high-level reading groups all ended the year reading at or above the grade-level textbook recommended by the publisher. The high group in Classroom D covered much more material than any other group. Possibly, the teacher may have started off these students low in the reading program at the beginning of the year. A greater disparity was noted in the amount of material covered by the lower groups. While some covered many books, one group only completed one pre-primer successfully during the school year. The lowest group successfully completed Bears, two of the lower groups completed the series through Boats, and three groups completed the series through Sunshine. All ended the year reading below the recommended grade-level textbook.

TABLE 4
BASAL TEXTBOOKS COMPLETED FOR LOW, MIDDLE, AND
HIGH READING GROUPS IN THE FOUR CLASSROOMS

Classroom	READING GROUPS			
	Low	Middle		High
A	Getting Reading to Read Bears Balloons Boats	Bears Balloons Boats Sunshine	—	Boats Sunshine Moonbeams
B	Bears Balloons Boats Sunshine	—	Balloons Boats Sunshine Moonbeams	Sunshine Moonbeams Skylights
C*	Bears Balloons (attempt)	—	Bears Balloons Boats Sunshine Moonbeams (Mag. 2)	Sunshine Moonbeams
D	Bears Balloons Boats	Bears Balloons Boats Sunshine (Mag. 2)	Bears Balloons Boats Sunshine Moonbeams	Balloons Boats Sunshine Moonbeams Skylights

*ELEPS group doing some reading in Bears is not listed as a formal reading group for classrooms.

The teachers who were observed followed their class schedules and tended to begin and end their reading group on time. The low-level reading group was scheduled first in all four classrooms; followed by the middle-level group(s); and, the high-level group was scheduled at the end of the reading period. Two of the teachers kept their reading groups to 30 minutes of instruction each. The other two teachers carried out their reading groups following schedules that were observed to be somewhat more flexible. Their low-level groups received their full 30 minutes of instruction as a rule and sometimes more. In one class, the teacher spent 38 minutes working with her low-level reading group. When a teacher spent more time with her low group than was allocated, she tended to pace her instruction with the middle- and high-level groups more rapidly. This pattern of instruction tended to result in the high-level group being often "short-changed" in the amount of time that they spent with the teacher. The high group in one of the classrooms received only 20 minutes of instruction on one of the days we observed one classroom. This occurred because the class was going to the library as a total group. The following day, this teacher gave the high reading group slightly more than their full time and presented a faster paced lesson than what was observed on the previous days.

The teacher guides are designed to provide a script for the content and sequence of the reading lessons. The four teachers were observed to use their guides. As a result, a good deal of uniformity was noted in the wording and strategies used to present their lessons. However, the flow and pacing of the instruction varied considerably among the classes and, even day to day within a particular class. While the teachers were working with their reading groups, they simultaneously kept an eye on students who were doing seatwork. When a student was perceived to stray off-task or the students became too noisy, the more experienced teachers in the study tended to stop their group instruction immediately, respond to the students directly, and, then, resume their instruction. The teacher who was the least experienced among those studied was more likely to deal with students on an individual basis or with the whole group in between the reading groups. An effective example of the former approach is given below.

Teacher to the group (low-level reading), "What does the sign say?" All but Tremayne who is on the wrong page respond, "for sale." Teacher looks at two boys across the room, "Excuse me people at the stations, I'm having reading. Glad your enjoying them (seashells), but please be quiet." The two boys spoken to move apart. The teacher returns her attention to the reading group, "Now continue reading to yourselves on page 20."

This behavior sequence lasted less than two minutes with the teacher immediately returning her attention to the group and the teaching script. We also observed some less effective teaching which occurred as the teacher monitored the classroom and conducted her reading group simultaneously. An illustrative example is given below.

Teacher (working with middle-level reading group) flips the instruction chart to the next page. "Let's talk about endings." As she points to words on the page, she asks students one by one, "What is the base word?" She is about halfway around the circle. A boy comes and stands by the group. Once he has the teacher's attention he says something in a soft voice. Teacher replies, "Nothing to do? Did you get everything done today? Get a

book then." Two more children come up to the teacher and she tells them the same thing. The teacher looks around the room calling the names of several students who are wandering about or talking with friends. She closes the instruction chart even though she has not finished the page. Teacher says to the group, "Okay, let's do some rhyming words now." Each student in the circle gives a rhyming word. She dismisses the group six minutes ahead of schedule.

The above sequence occurred as the noise level in the room was becoming quite high as many students had completed their seatwork and were distracting the others. The teacher may have prioritized getting students back on task or busy with other work as more important at that point than continuing with her reading group. The teacher cut her lesson short and did not return to the prescribed skills instruction. Instead, she presented rhyming words, a skill not taught in their basal textbook, Moonbeams, and one that presented no challenge to the group. The teacher dismissed this reading group early (24 minutes in length), and spent her time in-between groups to make sure that students were completing their seatwork or had something to do. Earlier, this same teacher had commented to the observers that she had a very "chatty" class this year, and they required more supervision than her classes in previous years. Similar incidents were observed in other classrooms in the study. In one instance, the teacher chose to continue with her lesson carrying it on for the full 30 minutes. In the other instance, the teacher stopped her instruction and explained to the whole class that she needed the class to quiet down in order to work with the reading group.

Each of the four teachers made it clear to students that it was very important that they not to be interrupted during reading time. They gave reminders to the entire class; ignored students who came up to the group for assistance; or, spoke to individual students who were disruptive to reinforce the importance of keeping the classroom quiet. In one classroom, the teacher had her students using "offices," that is, three-sided cardboard partitions which served as small study carrels. In three classrooms, the teacher maintained the responsibility of monitoring students while they did seatwork. The teacher in the fourth room used a parent volunteer on some days and her aide on other days to assist students. As a group, the teachers used many different types of incentives, tokens, and behavior management systems to recognize and encourage good work habits. One of the teachers who was observed spent time between each reading group asking the class for the names of "good workers" and writing those students' names on the chalkboard. Even so, this teacher consistently needed to give some attention away from the reading group to monitor the students working at the seats. In all of the four classrooms studied, the reading program appeared to run better some days than on others. Subjectively, the observers thought the noise-level in the classes seemed higher and students spent more time off task on Wednesdays than the other two days spent in each room.

Seatwork is generally used by teachers to practice and reinforce new skills and for classroom management (see Anderson et al, 1985). The students were observed to work in their Practice Books or on other assignments either independently, with an assigned classmate, or in informal groups. In only one classroom was an adult other than the teacher available to provide immediate assistance to the students. Students from the middle- and high-level groups were observed to successfully seek and obtain more assistance than students in the low groups. They were likely to ask for help from the teacher, aide, classmates, and even approached the observers. Students from the low groups tended to seek

assistance from others in their reading group or the teacher. As noted earlier, it was difficult to obtain assistance from the teacher because of an established agreement that she was not to be interrupted during reading period. Some teachers made time in between groups to respond to the students' questions.

There were differences noted among the classrooms in the grading of completed assignments in the Practice Books. For example, the teachers were observed to have their students correct and score their work from the previous day at the beginning of the reading group in two of the classrooms. They were given a deadline for turning-in incomplete work or assignments that needed to be redone. In one class, the students handed their Practice Book assignments to the teachers one-by-one and watched as she corrected and scored their papers. Little or no discussion took place between the teacher and students about the assignment with the exception of the teacher explaining work that might need to be redone or corrected. In a final class, the instructional aide corrected the papers before the reading group. The teacher handed them back to the students with some discussion at the beginning of the reading group. At the end of the group, assignments in the Practice Book were given for the next day.

In three of the classes, an instructional aide was available and worked with one achievement group doing reinforcement activities during the reading period. In two of these classes, the aide was available for the entire reading time daily. In the other room, the aide was available for one hour daily. The other teacher had an instructional aide for one hour three days weekly. The aide in this class spent her time correcting assignments or working with students individually or in groups as directed by the teacher. The advantage in having the aide take one reading group and work with them out of the classroom was that the teacher had to monitor fewer students doing independent seatwork at a time. In theory, at least, this is a good management strategy and should both reduce the noise-level of the classroom and result in better working conditions for students.

The aides in the classes were college students or parents who worked part-time. The aide's assignment at all four schools was split between several classrooms. The teachers interviewed indicated that finding, keeping, and training instructional aides were problems and the turn-over rate for aides was fairly high. As one principal indicated, "We do have a fair amount of turn-over with the aides, but some come and stay with us for a long time. The teaching assistants are strictly students, and they're not as committed to staying through the year. If they get a higher paying job, they're gone in a hurry."

The quality of the instruction given by the aides contrasted sharply from that given by the teachers in terms of content coverage, pacing, and disciplinary practices. The aides were observed to use supplementary materials with students such as flash cards, the Weekly Reader, or older basal series such as Harper Row or Scott Foresman. In one instance, the aide worked with students using the Bonus Book for enrichment activities. The material to be covered was specified by the teacher, although often the aides had to check with the students for more explanation of what was to be covered. This put the aide into an uneasy situation of not being fully in command of the students. It was unclear to the observers if these errors were made because the aides needed more supervision or they simply had not understood the teachers' directions. One aide was observed

to hand students the same supplementary materials and give the identical assignment two days in a row. When the students corrected her, she lost control of the group and spent most of that session trying to restore order to the group.

The aides do not have the training and experience of classroom teachers. As they were observed working with small groups of students, they had difficulties managing the students. Frequently, maintaining discipline was such a serious problem that it took substantial amounts of time away from instruction. The following behavioral sequence was observed as an instructional aide worked with a high-level reading group doing some reinforcement activities. The sequence lasted about ten minutes (one-third of the total time spent with the students).

The aide has flash cards in her hands. She sits on a chair and the students sit in a semicircle on the floor. She holds up a card and tells them to make a sentence using the word on the card. Josh, on the end, begins. [Observer notes students may be familiar with the activity, as no explanation was given to them.] Josh says, "I saw a bee go to the bathroom on the flower." Aide reprimands other students for talking out of turn. "Brian go stand with your face to the door, and next time I'll send you to the behavior board." Brian does as he is told. The aide says, "There are two kinds of be. Another kind of be is, like, I'll be there on Sunday." Students begin chatting among themselves. Aide makes "shh" noises. She picks up the flash cards to continue. She looks at Brian, "Are you ready to come back to the group?" Brian says no. Aide replies, "You aren't?" Brian answers, "Yes, I am," and he returns to his place in the circle. Aide says to the group, "Everyone's forgotten how to sit in the circle." Josh makes smacking noises with his mouth and swipes at the air with his hands. Aide says, "Josh, sit on your dollar (token)! Oh, that's right, you don't have them today."

At this point the aide sent Josh back to his seat in the classroom and returned to her lesson with the flashcards. This behavior sequence was very typical of those observed as the aides worked with students. They spent a high percentage of their time disciplining students and often their efforts were not effective. As the teachers were working with the reading groups at the same time, they were not available to assist the aides. In addition, the aides often failed to model or promote quality language interaction with the students. They tended to offer very limited information or model poor language. Three behavioral sequences illustrating such interactions are given below.

Steven and Charlene are reading the book, 101 Dalmatians together. Steven announces, "I like this part about the evil woman best!" He turns to the aide and asks, "What does snobby mean?" Charlene, another student says, "Has her nose in the air and doesn't talk to anyone." Steven is still looking at the aide. He says to her, "Prissy?" Aide answers, "That's a good one." Several other students come over to Steven and Charlene. They continue talking about the story characters, and the aide moves away from the group and starts picking up crayons that have rolled on to the floor.

"Okay, you guys, listen up. Today my three best students get a pencil."

"No looking on Brooke's paper," as the aide reprimands a student trying to copy another's work.

In addition to the instructional aides, the teachers used other resources available at their schools. These varied between schools. Three schools had a reading laboratory. The reading laboratories were used for LEP students and students identified as at-risk of retention. At one school, the teachers indicated that upper grade students who were working below grade-level had higher priority than first graders in receiving assistance from the reading laboratory. The basic skills assistance program operated at all four schools and was used as a resource for individual or small group tutoring for students in the lowest group. At one school, the teacher reported that she sent students for basic skills assistance on a daily basis. Teachers at other schools reported they did not have access to the basic skills assistance program on a regularly scheduled basis.

Parent volunteers were observed working in three of the classrooms studied. In two of these classes, we observed a number of parents assisting students at different times. In one of these rooms, the same parent came into the room each day that we were observing the classroom. She assisted students with their seatwork.

The issue of there not being enough basal textbooks for all of the students in a reading group was raised as a concern at one school in the study. A teacher on the advisory committee reported that teachers at her school were unable to start teaching the basic strand of the reading program last fall because they did not receive sufficient basal textbooks until the end of October due to unexpected growth in the student population at the school. Directions are given to teachers to incorporate other strands of the program which is what this teacher reported doing. Another issue raised was that first grade classrooms simply do not have an adequate supply of chairs. As a result, the students have to move their chairs from one location to another and often bump into each other or trip over the chairs in passing. Also, students end up sitting on the floor during instruction instead of moving the chairs. This was noted to be particularly unsuccessful with the aides as they attempted to maintain discipline and deliver a lesson to students seated or moving around uncomfortably on the floor.

Interactional Patterns with Students

The classroom observations were studied to identify recurring interactional patterns between teachers and students during reading instruction. Hiebert (1983) suggests that because the criterion for assigning students to groups is achievement, groups established for reading would be expected to form different instructional-social contexts which shape students' interactions with text and, in turn, influence learning outcomes. Following the view of researchers such as Mehan (1982), the interactions were considered to be reciprocal, and the student and teacher each active participants in the interaction. The student-teacher interactions were examined across the activities observed during the reading period including the teachers' instruction of achievement groups in the reading circle, instructional aides' work with students, and independent seatwork.

The instructional interactions occurring within the context of the reading groups were heavily controlled by the teachers. The teachers initiated and ended nearly every verbal interaction that was observed during group instruction. As indicated earlier, the general tone during reading circle was that it was to be taken as "serious business," and the teacher was in charge. The content of the teachers' verbal interactions and their pacing of the content was largely determined by the teacher's guide and did not vary significantly between the classrooms in the study.

During group instruction, the teachers' verbal comments which were not content-related were directed at keeping students attention on the task at-hand, offering praise and reinforcement, or managerial. The teachers initiated most of the verbal interaction. When the students responded to the teachers, their comments tended to be brief--typically five words or less. Only one teacher was observed to require full sentence responses from her students. For the most part, the teachers' pacing of the instruction did not leave much time for discussion. The students rarely initiated discussions or asked questions other than to understand an assignment during the reading circle. Seemingly in the interest of time, the teachers often "cut short" discussions such as given in the following example.

Teacher says, "Alright, who can give me the title?" Amy's hand shoots up. "Amy?" Amy reads the story's title. Charlene says, "My dad has a greenhouse, too. Just like the one in the picture." She turns to Rachel next to her. Teacher smiles and continues reading questions for the group from the teacher's guide.

The observed similarity in the teachers' interactions with students while instructing in the basal readers is shown in the next two observations conducted in two different classrooms. Both teachers were introducing a reading selection, "Too Little, Too Big" from the Boats textbook to their middle level reading group. As can be noted in the two classes (classroom 1 and classroom 2), the teachers covered approximately the same content using almost identical strategies and question sets. However, the teacher in classroom 1 anticipated the sequence of the instruction in that she didn't need to keep consulting her guide and was able to have more spontaneous interaction with her students. Each student in classroom 1 had a textbook before the instruction began, and the teacher provided a much smoother flow of instruction than noted in classroom 2.

The students in the two classes seemed quite familiar with the instructional script; in fact, they often had their hands up or gave the correct answer before the teacher had completed her question. In addition, the teachers structured the reading selection closely following the teacher's guide by introducing the story's title and characters and then proceeding through the selection reading and checking for comprehension. The teacher in classroom 1 had the students read both orally and silently while the teacher in classroom 2 only used silent reading exclusively as prescribed in the guide. The combined oral and silent reading used was a more time consuming approach and resulted in the group having to stop one page short of completing the reading selection that day. The recommended stopping point for the lesson was mid-point in the story. There were two lessons, basic skills instruction and reteaching basic skills, before students would continue with the reading selection.

Classroom 1. Teacher finishes up with the instruction chart. She asks students to put their Boats books on their laps. "I'm going to put some names on the board that are in the story we're going to read. Jennifer, can you read the first name?" Jennifer stumbles over the word and finally says, "Carla." Teacher replies, "Good!" Sheila says, "My sister's name begins with 'c,' too." Teacher smiles but continues asking each child to read one of the names on the board by following the seating arrangement. "Okay, please open your books to page 46 and read the title to yourselves." Teacher gives students time to read the title, then she asks, "Who is Judith Davis?" Students' hands are raised before she said the author's full name. [Observer notes that they seem real familiar with this line of questioning.] The teacher calls on Hardy who answers that person is the author. Teacher says, "Let's look at the picture on page 46." Students begin raising their hands as the teacher asks, "What's happening in the picture? Jennifer?" Hardy interrupts to respond, but the teacher reminds him that she is calling on children, "with their hands up." Jennifer responds. Teacher directs the students to read page 46 to themselves. She continues working with the students alternating oral reading with students reading the lines for the different characters, silent reading, and questioning comprehension through page 48.

Classroom 2. The teacher puts aside her instruction chart. "Let's start a new story, 'It's Too Little, Too Big.' Ronnie, can you be the helper and pass out the books?" Ronnie stands, takes the Boats basal readers off the shelves, and passes a book to each student. "Open your books to page 46. This is a story about Pablo. How do you spell Pablo?" Ronnie finds the name in the story and raises his hand before any other student. He spells Pablo. Teacher says, "Ronnie, you did a good job of finding the word on the page." Ronnie smiles. "Carla. Who can find her name?" Georgette spells Carla. The teacher reaches for a small chalkboard and writes out one-by-one the names of other main characters in the story. The students search for the names in their books, and one student, the first one with his or her hand up spells out the name. "Well done, boys and girls!" Reading from the guide, the teacher asks, "What's happening in the picture on page 46?" Kristen and Alisha answer together. "Okay, all read page 46 to yourself and look at me when you've finished. Read to find out what Pablo wants to do." All of the students read to themselves but aloud at different volumes and speeds. While the students are reading, the teacher looks ahead in the teacher's guide. She continues working with the students on this story alternating with their reading to themselves and asking comprehension questions through to page 49.

Review of the field notes indicated that the teachers made an effort to have all students participate in the reading groups. For oral reading, the students took turns each reading a passage or sentence in the order that they were seated. Each teacher indicated that the students chose where they wanted to sit in the reading circle. The student seated on the end was usually the teacher's "helper" or "monitor" and got to distribute and collect the books for the day. In one of the classes, the teacher assigned a "helper" for the week. In one class, we asked Sabrina, a student who always tried to sit in the end seat next to the teacher but across from the "helper" each day why she preferred sitting in that particular seat. Her answer was, "I like to be first. If I can't be first, I'll be number two." Even though the seats were not assigned, students seemed to have a preferred seat and took it each day. While some students allowed others to sit in their seat, others like Sabrina would tell anyone

sitting in "her" seat to take another. Probably, some students cared more about keeping their same seat or were more successful in maintaining it than were others. The teachers seemed very careful to give each student equal opportunities to participate in reading. Following the seating arrangement was one way that equal opportunities were ensured in oral reading and practicing skills. The teachers were less formal as they called on students whose hands were raised to answer questions. Teachers made sure all students had a chance to participate. They called on students who were quiet or not raising their hands to encourage their participation.

The reason for small group instruction is that it should allow the teacher to adapt instruction to students' learning needs. The teachers in the study all conducted their reading instruction in a business-like manner following the prescribed pacing. In only one instance was a teacher observed to make the decision, "in-flight," to completely change a group's activity during reading based on identified problems. In this example, the teacher had the students in her low group correct their Practice Book assignments from the previous day. As she double-checked their answers and noted most had not understood the assignment, the teacher announced to the group, "We need some more work on vowels." Instead of continuing with the planned group activity, the teacher presented the students with flash cards to reinforce the Practice Book assignment. Also, she conferred with her aide and made changes in the aide's tasks for the day to allow additional time to be spent with the group reinforcing the vowel sounds.

While the pacing of content appeared to move along briskly in most of the reading groups, one wonders about issues of quality and the amount of actual student learning. Among the four teachers studied, the teacher who covered the most content (number of basal readers completed) also had to interrupt her instruction to manage students' doing seatwork more than any other teacher in the study. The questions that she used to check students' understanding were taken exclusively from the teacher's guide and may have been used more for recall than to enhance thinking. As indicated earlier, very little discussion was observed to take place during reading instruction in each of the classes. This was probably both a function of the types of questions asked and the amount of time that was available. Two of the teachers studied had the students follow along in their textbooks using markers to keep their place. Additionally, both of these teachers noticeably made sure that students in all of their reading groups understood how to organize their Practice Book assignments. The following sequence observed in one class illustrates how the teacher tried to ensure students knew what they were to be doing at their seats.

Teacher says, "Now I want you to listen so you understand the assignment. Turn to page 3. Put your name at the top." Students in the group write their names. "Remember we did this skill on the chart yesterday." Together with the group, the teacher reads and explains the directions.

In three of the classes studied, the students remained together for small group instruction with the aides and seatwork throughout the reading period. In one classroom, the instructional aide provided assistance to students working on seatwork or singled out students individually or in small groups for a specific activity. As the aides worked with groups of students, they had problems both keeping students' attention and controlling students' behavior. This was noted to be especially difficult when students were sitting on the floor as observed in two of the rooms.

The aides encountered problems as they worked with all of the different achievement groups. Students made frequent requests to go to the bathroom, spoke out of turn, and, often, ignored the aide's direction. In each class where the aide worked with the students by achievement groups, it required substantial effort to maintain control of the group. The noise level tended to be high. While the group usually completed the assigned task, it was done so far less effectively than observed in the groups conducted by the teachers. When the teachers periodically checked on the groups, the noise level immediately dropped, and students paid attention to their work. In three classrooms, the aide worked with the students away from the classroom so the teacher wasn't able to constantly check on how things were going. The teachers were aware that the aides needed assistance and provided rewards such as pencils or stickers and tokens that the aides could use as incentives for good behavior.

While the teachers tried to give students equal opportunities to respond, the aides were not as successful because of their difficulty keeping the group quiet and on task. Several interactional patterns used by the aides further complicated their problems. For example, an aide tried to control the group through a steady stream of verbal commands which were a combination of instruction, directions, and reprimands. This wasn't successful and order almost immediately broke down with the group. The basic problem was that the aide's directions were often unclear to the students, and, consequently, they simply did not understand what was expected such as illustrated by the following sequence.

Instructional aide says, "What's in the picture?" Troy, "What picture?" Alex to Troy, "All kinds of things. I like this (he points to a wagon) the best." The two boys giggle. Aide, "John sit down. Sheila, read the next page." Sheila looks at the aide (for more direction). Aide says, "Read on page 12."

Another observed interactional pattern that was troublesome was when the aide would call on a student who was being disruptive to read. The student would be called on out of sequence, and was often unprepared to respond. This served as a form of negative reinforcement to the student, but was not successful in curbing the disruptive behavior. An example of illustrating this interaction type is given below.

"Okay, page 14. Let's read the words that go together. The first row, Jennifer?" Students continue each reading a word pair and taking turns in the seating order. Aide interrupts, "Michael, Michael, pay attention! Michael, sit down!" Michael sits down. "Michael, read the next pair (of words)." Michael reads but is on the wrong page.

In addition, the aides were observed to be particularly ineffective working with the group when they were unprepared or uncertain about an assignment task. For example, the aide in one class was observed to ask the students what the teacher had told them to do for each task of the activity that she was supposed to conduct. Each time she checked with the students, it took several minutes for her to recover control of the group.

The students in each class spent at least one-third and as much as three quarters of the reading period doing seatwork. Their seatwork consisted of assignments from the Practice Books, writing assignments, supplementary phonics worksheets, and independent reading. Some students clearly preferred to work on their own and not be interrupted by other students. However, most of the students worked together either sitting side by side or getting up to check on each other. As students from the reading groups were doing their seatwork at the same time, they tended to prefer to interact with each other. This was observed even when students from other groups were available.

There appeared to be an established "group identity" among students in the reading groups. As a group, the students made an effort to finish up their assignments during reading time. Most of the students kept on task for the preliminary 10 to 15 minutes of their assigned seatwork time. Review of the observation data indicated that students in the high-level reading groups were more likely to stay with their work for longer time and seek assistance than were students in the low-level groups. However, after approximately 15 minutes students regardless of their achievement group drifted away from working on their assignments whether or not they had been completed. They checked on each others' progress often giving unsolicited advice, "kibbitzing"; they asked each other for assistance; chatted about topics that were clearly off-task such as who should be invited to a birthday party; or, sat at their seat watching others. Copying from each others' paper was observed in some of the classes. This seemed most likely to occur when a paper was due, and the student had not gotten it done the previous day. Group members kept tabs on each other. In one class, a student became ill, and several students in her group went immediately to the teacher to report that Melissa was not well.

In her review of the research literature on achievement grouping, Hiebert (1983) infers that ability groupings serve as a primary social instructional context for students. Our observations suggest interactions that take place during the reading circle are teacher-controlled for the most part and "driven" by the instructional script given in the teacher's guide. This is fairly uniform for each achievement group. However, some real differences emerge between opportunities for students to learn skills and attitudes as a function of their participation as a member of a particular group during independent seatwork and small group work with the aides.

Students in the high-level groups were observed to have better developed work habits and able to seek assistance more efficiently. Students in the low-level groups are often designated as at-risk or have other identified learning problems. These groups also contain disproportionately high numbers of Black students, Hispanic students, and Limited English Proficient students. As students spend a fair amount of time together operating as a group during reading period, students in the low-level groups may be exposed to fewer opportunities to learn successful work-related skills and attitudes. On the other hand, students in the high-level groups may be at an advantage to start off with and further enhance their edge through exposure to the higher quality learning strategies and work skills modeled by their peers. The differential socialization as it occurs during seatwork needs very close attention. By having students work on seatwork as achievement groups, teachers may unsuspectingly be setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom.

Individual Learning Styles

Teachers who participated in the study agreed that the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program was well adapted for their more capable readers, but clearly not the best program for their less successful students. They believed that elements such as vocabulary development and phonics are not emphasized enough in the Houghton Mifflin program. These were skills that students in the low-level groups really needed. In addition, adequate time was not allowed for students to review stories for fluency and pleasure. As stated by one teacher, "They (students in the low-level groups) really need time to be comfortable with a story. The guide moves along too fast for this to happen." Another teacher believed that books such as those by Dr. Seuss provided more tools and a better foundation in reading than Houghton Mifflin did for her low group.

While we could contend that all students need more individualized instruction, the fact remains that, by following the prescribed district reading program, the teachers were allocating equivalent amounts of time and using standard instructional materials strategies with all achievement groups. This did not allow teachers to match their instruction to the learning styles of individual students. Allington (1984) asserts that poorer readers will continue to experience ever-increasing deficits unless they are provided with learning strategies and instructional environments that allow them to acquire the skills of successful readers such as learning to read fluently and self-monitor their work. This may mean additional reading sessions, increased opportunities for silent reading, and more contextual reading assignments as seatwork for the less capable readers.

The teachers expressed concern that their less capable readers were just not successful in Houghton Mifflin. One teacher stated, "There is an overwhelming need for something else for children with learning problems, and the Intervention Packets (for at-risk students) aren't it." Several teachers suggested using more supplementary materials with the low group or taking them through the readers a second time. As indicated earlier, one of the teachers in the study ended up taking her low level group out of Houghton Mifflin because of her assessment that they were not making any progress. Students' reading progress as determined by their basal textbook placement is used along with other factors to make decisions about retention. As one teacher indicated, "It's a hard decision, I'd never use only their reading. I use my judgment and when retaining doesn't seem to be in the best interests of the kid, then I'll move them on instead of repeating first grade. It's tough, though, because they'll be in the same books (Houghton Mifflin) next year, and the second grade teachers will ask me why I passed them on."

Table 5 presents the numbers of children with special needs or identified as at-risk in the four classrooms observed. Each classroom contained LEP students who received 30 minutes of ESL instruction in addition to the classroom program, special education students who received assistance from a resource specialist or speech therapist, and students who had been identified as at-risk of retention. All of the at-risk students received some additional sessions with the Basic Skills Supplementary Assistance Program (BSSAP) teacher assigned to the school and extra help from the reading lab teacher in three of the schools. In Classroom A and Classroom C, all of the at-risk students were to be retained in

first grade. In Classroom B and Classroom D, all of the at-risk students would be placed in second grade but remain as at risk. In Classroom A, one student, who was redeployed from a second grade class, would be retained in second grade for the second time. With the exception of her and a LEP student in Classroom C, all of the LEP students, special education students, and at-risk students were in the low level reading group in their classrooms.

TABLE 5
STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR
IDENTIFIED AS AT-RISK IN THE
FOUR CLASSROOMS STUDIED

Classroom	LEP	Special Education	At-Risk
A	2	2	4
B	3	1	4*
C	5	2	4
D	3	1	2*

*Recommended to go on to second grade
as at-risk.

The issue of whether or not all first graders have the maturity and overall readiness to handle the pace of the reading program was a recurring theme in the interviews and among the advisory committee members. The teachers had several concerns related to this issue. The first concern was that we may be attempting to do too much in first grade. Many of the teachers believed that there was just too much pressure being placed on first graders today. One teacher commented that our program trains students to become "workaholics" or "future drop-outs" in first grade. With the high expectations and "so many more children today with special needs," many teachers doubted that their fast-paced progress was in the best interests of the young child. Their expressed doubts were in line with the views expressed by early childhood educators that we may be expecting too much of young children ("Tense Tots," Wall Street Journal, July 6, 1988).

A second concern had to do with the effects of this pressure upon students' self-confidence and is illustrated by the following teacher comments.

"Bears, Balloons, and Boats half the kids feel defeated. They never get out of these books (preprimers). Work all year preparing to read, and they never get into Sunshine."

"Why are we being so demanding in first grade? We have five books to cover. It's not going to help by adding more (books) at kindergarten. The low kids are going to stay in low groups year after year unless we can do something different for them. If we can't do something to build their confidence at first grade, then they're never going to feel good (confident) about reading!"

A final concern was that the teachers felt instead of trying to teach, test, and reteach skills, they need to consider different approaches for direct reading instruction in the primary grades. As a group, the teachers tended to believe that students were more mature and better equipped to "go the distance" with academic instruction by second grade. In first grade, time might be better spent developing students' basic vocabulary and language skills and exposing students to reading skills instead of the current emphasis on teaching, testing, and reteaching. Many teachers spoke about trying a more "holistic" approach toward reading and language instruction. They underscored the importance of helping primary grade students learn about reading and writing for pleasure before more formal instruction begins. Most teachers were skeptical that they were giving full justice to all four strands of the reading program in first grade. They reported that they tried to implement each strand to some degree to achieve a more comprehensive reading program.

A large segment of the final meeting of the teachers' advisory committee was set aside for discussion of strategies and practices used by first grade teachers to enhance reading instruction. These are given below.

- ° "Replace mathematics with literature on minimum days."
- ° "On Fridays, we use cooperative group work for clue/key words which get into the literature."
- ° "I use partner reading in my class, matching stronger, average, and weaker readers together. Students read books of their choice (mini-books, library books, basal readers) to each other."
- ° "I stray away from the basals and use supplementary materials."
- ° "During sharing (time), children choose a book or passage to read to the class."
- ° "I read aloud every day after lunch. We all pick the books, and I make sure that everyone gets one book they especially want at least once."
- ° "Cross-age reading with another class such as first graders reading with fourth graders."
- ° "Try to use activity centers that reinforce reading."
- ° "My children love the basal stories. We put on the plays, stories make a good readers' theater."
- ° "I give my children a copy of the list of recommended books at the end of each magazine. When they find a book (from the list), they bring it to class to share."
- ° "It's a long walk to the library, but I take my children to the library, and they get their first library card." This teacher reported that she took her students to the city library as a class activity on a regularly scheduled basis.

- ° "I work with four-to-eight-year-olds in a combination first grade and kindergarten class, and often use a supplemental basal. Fun comes from the teacher. We make puppets, pictures. This takes extra energy, and each year there are fewer supplies."

One final group of responses from the teacher interview data pertained to the role of the parents in helping their children learn to read. Studying the effects of parents' participation and involvement in the reading program on students' reading was beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, in light of teachers' spontaneous comments and the district's policy on parent involvement recently adopted by the Board of Education, these data are briefly reported. At two of the schools in the study, the teachers reported that they experienced a fair amount of pressure from parents who were eager to move their children into the higher levels of the basal reader series. Although they tried to respond to a parent's concerns, students were not moved into another group based on parental request unless the teacher had reason to believe a change was in the child's best interests. Some teachers sent home flashcards and word lists so that the parents could work with their children at home on a regular basis. One of these teachers noted, "We can't get it all taught at school and need to use the parents to help out. Some (of the parents) just don't have the time or patience so this just doesn't work in all cases." Other teachers indicated that they relied very little on the parents to work with their children at home. All of the teachers whose classrooms were observed said that they made a special effort to work as closely as possible with parents of at-risk students such as sending home supplementary materials and specific reading assignments. Parents of children who become successful readers play an active role in monitoring and being involved with their child's learning progress (Binkley et al, 1988). While there are many different ways for parents to help their children become successful in school, the data did not reveal a consistent way that teachers were working with parents to help them accomplish this task.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation was conducted to address two main questions. The first question was to identify characteristics about the first grade reading program that contribute to the high percent of student reading in below grade-level basal textbooks at the completion of first grade. The second question was to discern factors that may enable some first graders to be successful in the reading program and others to be placed in textbooks that are below grade-level. In general, the classroom observations showed that teachers are working hard to follow and complete the district's prescribed reading program for first grade and should be commended for their efforts. However, based on the evaluation findings, one would conclude that equity in student placement will not be achieved fully in the first grade reading program due to the practice of grouping students for reading instruction, instructional strategies, and the reliance, even dependence, of teachers on the basal textbooks. The three other strands of the reading program (content, literature, and reinforcement) are virtually ignored. The current study supports findings from the earlier district evaluations which showed: 1) the majority of teachers' direct reading instruction was in the basal reading series; and, 2) 49.5 percent of all students continue to complete first grade reading in below grade-level textbooks as specified by the publisher with disproportionately high numbers of these students being Black students, Hispanic students, and students from bilingual or non-English speaking backgrounds. Table 3 on page 13 of this report contains these data.

As recommended in the Reading Handbook K-6 (1984), grouping students for instruction by reading level is to be determined through the use of the basal tests developed by the publisher and teacher judgement. The teachers reported that they used these methods along with the recommendation of the previous year's teacher to form their reading groups. Their groups tended to be established by the sixth week of school. While teachers indicated that they placed many students into different reading groups on a trial basis throughout the school year, review of school documents showed that actually 15 students (13.5 percent) among the four classrooms studied were moved into different reading groups. Thirteen of these students were moved to a higher level group, and two students moved into a lower group. The reported mobility among groups was as follows: six students were moved from the low to high reading group; and, four students were moved from the middle-level to the high reading group. Two students who had been redeployed to another classroom were unsuccessful and returned to their class and their original (middle-level) reading group. The teachers at three of the schools indicated that their school had a policy of not placing students more than one basal textbook level above a student's grade level.

The use of basal tests to determine students' reading level and textbook placement raises substantive issues concerning how "grade-level" is determined by the publisher. Following the recommended procedures contained in the district reading handbook, students' performance on basal tests is used for grouping students for instruction, determining their reading progress, and, also, in making promotion and retention decisions. In a report prepared by the Commission on Reading, National Council of Teachers of English, Watson et. al (1987) present a comprehensive review and discussion of basal tests specific to their limited field testing and the lack of standardization norms or available validation studies. They question the assumption that basal tests and textbook placement substantiate "grade-level" reading performance. Establishing students' reading level and placing students into achievement groups using the standards specified by the publisher may be erroneous. This practice may ultimately result in not all students having equal access to a high quality education and, therefore, placing many students in the low-level groups at a real disadvantage in terms of available learning and social opportunities. Because there is so little mobility reported among the reading groups after the sixth week of school, the practice of grouping students for reading instruction particularly in the primary grades may be setting up tracking patterns for students from early on in their school career. In Becoming a Nation of Readers, Anderson et. al (1985) cite research findings which suggest that it is not so much ability that determines the future attainment of a young child, but the reading group into which the child is initially placed.

The teachers in the study followed their guides closely and controlled the verbal interaction occurring within each reading group in order to maintain the prescribed content pacing. While students are placed by achievement groups for reading instruction, it was not clear that instructional strategies, reading materials, or allocated time varies much between the different groups or was adapted to accommodate learning styles or individual students. While some of

the teachers successfully met students' instructional needs, others did not. One teacher in the study believed the composition of her class resulted in a "chatty" group who required considerable supervision. In addition, she had an instructional aide who was not working out successfully. This resulted in classroom management problems which required the teacher to constantly interrupt her reading instruction to handle.

Instructional aides were available in each of the classes studied. We observed that when the aides are used for small group instruction, they spend much of their time dealing with disciplinary problems. These problems appear related to the aides' uncertainty about how to effectively manage small group instruction, lack of preparation, and their unclear directions to students. Clearly, there must be better ways to utilize the instructional aides as a resource. In some classes, students spend up to 75 percent of the reading period doing seatwork. As students tended to work together with others in their reading group, students in high-level groups and those in low-level groups have differential opportunities to learn successful work-related skills and attitudes. More whole group instruction and mixing of students with different reading levels may allow low-level students to learn successful strategies and work habits.

When some technique or strategy was judged as unsuccessful with students, the teachers tried to make use of resources such as the basic skills teacher or reading labs if they were available. Not all teachers reported equal access to resources outside the basic classroom program such as reading laboratory assistance and the BSSAP teachers among the schools studied. In theory, students in the primary grades should have high priority to receive such assistance. This assistance is necessary to provide all students a strong reading foundation and opportunity to approach the academic setting on equal terms. In some classrooms teachers had ways of involving parents with their children's reading. However, most teachers did not have a system in place for providing parents ways of assisting with reading at home. The self-reports of new teachers indicated that they need additional assistance about how to pace content, classroom management practices, and resources to use when students are not successful. New teachers in the study did not have staff development or technical assistance given to them on a systematic basis.

As a group, the teachers expressed concern that students in their low-level groups tended not to understand what reading was all about until they were well into the primer-level basal textbook, that is, the fourth book in the sequence of the publisher's specified program for first grade. The main feature of the English-Language Arts Curriculum Framework recommended by the California State Department of Education is, "a systematic literature program with a meaning-centered approach based on intensive reading, writing, speaking, and listening." If our findings can be generalized to other first grade classrooms, it appears that many young children may not understand the relationship reading has to what they were working with in the preprimer textbooks with the skill-based approach used in the district's reading program.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on in-depth study of teachers' perspectives and observations of reading instruction in first grade classrooms, the evaluation yielded descriptive

information about features of the district's reading program that may contribute to the high percent of students who complete first grade reading in below grade-level textbooks. The classroom observations and interview data showed that teachers are working hard to follow and complete the district's prescribed reading program for first grade. They should be recognized for their efforts and commended for trying to supplement and extend the literacy materials in order to achieve a more comprehensive reading program for students.

The main conclusion from the study is that by following the basal reader textbook almost exclusively and placing students into achievement groups, the district's reading program may not be providing all first grade students equal opportunities to receive the highest quality reading instruction. Students with low level reading skills need more time and assistance to become successful readers than they receive currently. Teachers report that they attempt to implement the policy on continuous progress and student reassessment by trying students out in different reading groups throughout the year. However, very few students actually moved into a different reading group (13.5 percent in the current study). Students receive their reading instruction in achievement groups and continue working with their group members for seatwork and with the classroom aide during the reading period. They have limited interaction with students from other groups, and, for students in the low-level groups, few opportunities to learn the work skills and attitudes of the more successful students. In addition, classroom management and instructional practices such as using untrained aides for small group work with students, closely following the instructional approach prescribed in the teacher's guide for all groups, allotting equal time to high-level and low-level reading groups, and using a skill-based reading program are other features of the first grade reading program that should be changed so that all students receive a high quality program. Finally, an important secondary finding of the study was that first year teachers reported that they had trouble pacing their instruction and covering the prescribed materials. They needed more technical assistance from other teachers and staff development than was available.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAFF

The district's commitment to equity in education may not be achieved if high risk students such as those assigned to the low-level reading groups are not given extra assistance and allowed to interact with students assigned to higher level reading groups. Specific recommendations for staff action directed at correcting features of the current first grade reading program which deny students equal learning and social opportunities and result in less capable readers experiencing deficits are given below.

1. District administrative and teaching staff should assess the benefits versus the disadvantages of grouping students in basal textbooks for reading instruction especially in the primary grades because of the inflexible nature of the groups. Grouping should be used for specific skills and should be flexible and change according to need. The numbers of students remaining in the same group for the entire year should decrease.
2. If aides are used as a resource in the classroom, they need more training to be effective in their work with students.

3. Specific direction should be given to teachers on classroom management strategies and how to individualize instruction so that the less capable readers acquire the skills of successful readers such as learning to read fluently and to self-monitor their work. As identified by empirical studies (see Allington, 1984), this means additional reading sessions, increased opportunities for silent reading, and more contextual reading assignments.
4. District staff should re-think the focus of the reading program in first grade, particularly in light of the emphasis of the new state framework on an "integrated" and "literature-based" approach to language arts instruction. Provisions should be made so that teachers are enabled to implement an effective reading program. This means allocating time and resources for increased "teacher-to-teacher" assistance, staff development and follow-up, and a wide range of literacy materials.
5. Special provisions should be made for first-year teachers to receive increased technical assistance, more opportunities to learn from mentor teachers, and staff development beginning immediately in the school year.

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APPENDIX A
STUDENT PLACEMENT IN BASAL READER
OBSERVATION FORM

STUDENT PLACEMENT IN BASAL READER
-Observation Form-

Teacher: _____

Page: _____

School: _____

Indexing categories:

Date: _____

Observer: _____

Time/ Description	Teacher Action	Student Action

APPENDIX B
ELEMENTARY READING TEXTBOOK ASSIGNMENT RECORD

SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOL

1. Fill in the date on which the student enters the classroom.
2. Note the completion date for every test that the student completes.
3. Note the incomplete test at the end of the year by placing an "I" in that column.
4. Note any extenuating circumstances such as illness in the comments section.
5. At the end of each semester, return the evaluation copy to the Evaluation Department, Room 3150, Education Center

TEACHER _____ SCHOOL YEAR _____

STUDENT NAME	Grade of Student	Entry Date	A. Getting Ready to Read	B. Bears	C. Balloons	D. Boats	E. Sunshine	F. Moonbeams	G. Skylights	H. Towers	I. Spinners	J. Weavers	K. Gateways	L. Banners	M. Beacons	N. Emblems	O. Awards	COMMENTS

APPENDIX C
STUDENT PLACEMENT IN THE BASAL READER
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS
Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division
Evaluation Department

STUDENT PLACEMENT IN THE BASAL READER
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ROSTER

<u>NAME</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>WORK PHONE</u>	<u>POSITION</u>
Randi Aftreth	Hardy	582-0136	Gr.1/2 Tchr.
Janetha Bailey	Webster	263-6628	Gr.2 Mtr. Tchr.
Nicki Hayman	Jones	277-2350	Gr.2 Tchr.
A.K. Jones	Sunset View	223-7156	Gr.1 Tchr.
Mary Ann Jones	Room 2009/Ed Center	293-8164	Resource Tchr.
Patty McCullough	Fremont	298-8275	Gr.1/2 Mtr. Tchr.
Janet McDaid	Room 3133/Ed Center	293-8503	Evaluator
Linda Miller	Hickman	271-5210	Gr.3 Mtr. Tchr.
Kate Murty	Room 3150/Ed Center	293-8517	Resource Tchr.
Patty Osborne	Johnson	264-0103	Gr.1 Tchr.
Mercy Ramirez	Balboa	263-8151	Gr.1 Tchr.
Jane Slama	Jackson	582-3527	Gr.1 Tchr.
Betty Tomblin	Room 3150/Ed Center	293-8433	Asst. Dir.

JLM:bgm
03/03/88

roster

APPENDIX D
BASIC CATEGORY CODINGS OF TEACHERS' INTERVIEW RESPONSES
AND BEHAVIORAL SEQUENCES FROM CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

BASIC CATEGORY CODINGS OF TEACHERS' INTERVIEW RESPONSES
AND BEHAVIORAL SEQUENCES FROM CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

1. Instructional Materials Used in the Reading Program

- 1.0 Specific skills taught in first grade including teachers' perceptions of what is important and what is not along with their comments about not having time to cover everything during the school year.
- 1.1 Teachers' perceptions that phonics including vowel sounds need strong emphasis in first grade and are not adequately covered by Houghton Mifflin materials.
- 1.2 Supplementary materials to Houghton Mifflin program considered necessary to teach reading vocabulary and sight words; includes teachers' perceptions that it is essential to teach these skills in first grade.
- 1.3 Teacher perceptions that while critical thinking skills and many reading skills should be introduced, they should not be formally tested in first grade.
- 1.4 Teachers' opinions about the Houghton Mifflin instructional materials/aides and their value to the reading program.
- 1.5 Observed reliance by teachers on the guides for the scope and sequence of their reading instruction including teacher perceptions about how following the prescribed program delimits instruction.
- 1.6 Teachers' concerns that the pacing of content may impact upon students' acquiring reading fluency and enjoyment of literature.
- 1.7 Teachers' impressions of the basal tests pertaining to format, design, and standardization procedures. Also, includes decisions to make about alignment of instruction to tests, and what to do when students fail magazine tests but seem to have the skills.
- 1.8 Student perceptions about their performance on the magazine tests; includes how performance affects their potential basal reader placement.

2. Achievement Grouping for Reading Instruction

- 2.0 Factors affecting teachers' decisions in forming and establishing achievement groups for reading.
- 2.1 Teachers' perceptions about the district's continuous progress policy and how it relates to the establishment and maintenance of achievement groups for reading.
- 2.2 Attempts to achieve flexible grouping, and teachers' thoughts about moving students between groups including decisions to make as students enter the classroom after groups are established and placing students, who are new to the Houghton Mifflin Program.

- 2.3 Decisions to be made about students who need placement in above grade-level basal readers as related to school site policy on such placements.
 - 2.4 Teacher opinions about problems with redeployment to other classrooms for reading and the amount of redeployment actually accomplished during the school year.
 - 2.5 Observed student membership in the achievement groups in relation to racial/ethnic identity.
 - 2.6 Teachers' projected student placement in the basal readers for the next school year includes factors considered in the decision-making.
3. Classroom Management and Organization
- 3.0 Classroom observations about the uniformity of the reading program at first grade in teachers' instructional approach, content pacing, and adherence to the Houghton Mifflin teacher's guide.
 - 3.1 Class schedules closely followed for reading period with flexibility observed in time spent with different ability groups.
 - 3.2 Reading groups received standard instruction in the basal reader for content and sequencing by ability groups.
 - 3.3 Teachers' actions while they instructed students in the reading circle and concurrently monitored students doing independent seatwork.
 - 3.4 Actions taken by students to obtain assistance and amount provided to the low-level and high-level ability groups during time allocated for seatwork.
 - 3.5 Teacher approaches toward the grading of reading assignments including whether the teacher or students grade the work and when this is done.
 - 3.6 Actions taken by instructional aides to handle students' disciplinary problems and off-task behavior, also, includes types of assistance and instructional approaches observed.
 - 3.7 Teachers' perceptions about instructional aides pertaining to training, experience, and rate of turnover.
 - 3.8 Observed functions of parent volunteers assisting in the classrooms during reading instruction.
 - 3.9 Teacher perceptions about the availability of supplies and materials and subsequent impact on classroom management during reading.

4. Interactional Patterns Between Teachers and Students

- 4.0 Teacher-initiated verbal interactions during reading circle to give direction to students. (4.0.1. Low group; 4.0.2. Middle group; 4.0.3. High group).
- 4.1 Teachers' verbal interactions with Houghton Mifflin instructional materials during reading circle. (4.1.1. Low group; 4.1.2. Middle group; 4.1.3. High group).
- 4.2 Teachers' pacing of presentation during reading circle (4.2.1. Low group; 4.2.2. Middle group; 4.2.3. High group).
- 4.3 Teacher preparation for reading circle lesson including having materials, books, lesson plan at hand (4.3.1. Low group; 4.3.2. Middle group; 4.3.3. High group).
- 4.4 Teachers' spontaneous interactions with students during reading circle including monitoring students doing seatwork, and handling interruptions (4.4.1. Low group; 4.4.2. Middle group; 4.4.3. High group).
- 4.5 Teachers' patterns of calling on students for answers or response during reading circle (4.5.1. Low group; 4.5.2. Middle group; 4.5.3. High group).
- 4.6 Teachers' spontaneous decision-making during reading circle including changes in classroom schedule or instructional tasks.
- 4.7 Student-initiated verbal interactions during reading circle including responsibilities, seating preferences, and spontaneous comments to each other and teacher. (4.7.1. Low group; 4.7.2. Middle group; 4.7.3. High group).
- 4.8 Instructional aides' verbal interactions with students during small group reading instruction including presentation strategies, controlling students, approaches in handling disruptive behavior, and deference to students. (4.8.1. Low group; 4.8.2. Middle group; 4.8.3. High group).
- 4.9 Students' verbal interactions during independent seatwork includes seeking assistance from adults, seeking assistance from classmates, interaction among and between different reading groups, work habits including modeling of other students, off-task activity among and between reading groups.

5. Individual Learning Styles

- 5.0 Perceptions about the adequacy of the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program for less capable readers and for strong readers including specific skill instruction and pacing adaptation allowed for individual students.

- 5.1 Teacher thoughts about the adequacy of the current first grade reading program for special needs students, e.g., LEP students, at-risk students, special education students.
- 5.2 Decisions concerning retention and promotion of first grade students based on reading performance including factors considered in decision-making.
- 5.3 Teachers' perceptions about the use of additional reading materials and alternative approaches with first graders who were having difficulties progressing through the basal reader series.
- 5.4 Concerns specific to the maturity and readiness of all first graders to handle the pacing of the reading program includes teachers' thoughts about the effects on students' self-confidence and later success (or failure) in school.
- 5.5 Teachers' thoughts about alternative instructional approaches including "holistic," meaning-based instruction, developmental approaches, and emphasizing basic vocabulary and language skills in primary grades before actually beginning formal instruction.
- 5.6 Teachers' actions to involve parents in helping their children to become successful readers.